Ford Would Sift New Data In Kennedy, King Slayings

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 26 — President Ford last night urged that "some responsible group or organization" investigate "new developments" that have arisen concerning the assassinations of President Kennedy and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Under questioning by reporters at a White House news conference, the President said he favored such an inquiry in the Kennedy case if the new developments could be "investigated without reopening the whole matter...I think some responsible group or organization should do so, but not to report on all other aspects." [Question 21, Page 42.]

He said that because he had served on the Warren Commission in the Kennedy assassination, a new inquiry should be conducted by "somebody other than I appoint." He declined to call the new information "evidence" and noted that a "staff member" thinks a new inquiry should be undertaken.

This is an apparent reference to David W. Belin, a senior staff member on the Warren Commission, who, last Saturday, urged Congress to reopen the Warren Commission hearings to lay to rest the questions posed by the new data.

The "new developments" in the Kennedy assassination are mainly the information that the Central Intelligence Agency never told the Warren Commission that it had mounted several plots against Prime Minister Fidel Castro of Cuba.

This was the first time tha President Ford had publicly ac knowledged that the new developments in the Kennedy assassination might warrant investigation. Although the President had never said in the past that he opposed a reopened inquiry he had always stood by the findings of the Warren Commission.

The President again said that he had ordered that "under no circumstances should any agency of this Government, while I'm President, participate in or plan for any assassination of a foreign leader." He also said that he had ordered the intelligence agencies not to violate the law protecting the privacy of citizens.

Earlier today Attorney General Edward H. Levi announced through a spokesman that he had assigned two top level Department of Justice officials to review the investigation of Dr. King's death in the light of testimony that the black leader had been a target of harassment by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

A spokesman for Mr. Levi said the Attorney General had instructed J. Stanley Pottinger and Richard L. Thornburgh, Assistant Attorneys General, to review the file and advise him on whether the investigation should be reopened.

President Ford told reporters tonight that he also favored an effort to identify the men in the F.B.I. who had subjected Dr. King to the harassment.

The Warren Commission, to which Mr. Ford alluded, did not investigate Dr. King's death. It served for 10 months in 1964, investigating the shooting of President Kennedy in Dallas in Nov. 22, 1963. It concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald, a marine who had defected to the Soviet Union, had acted alone in killing the President.

Spokesman for Mr. Levi, in referring to the review to be conducted on Dr. King's case, said "this is not in itself a reopening of the matter . . . Mr. Levi has no indication that the original investigation was anything less than thorough."

He said that Mr. Levi ordered the review after testimony before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence confirmed that the F.B.I. had conducted a six-year effort to discredit Dr. King and to remove him from leadership of the civil rights movement. It was the F.B.I. that also conducted the investigation of the killing.

Dr. King, who led the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to the forefront of the civil rights movement, was shot to death on the balcony of a Memphis motel on April 4, 1968. The F.B.I. later identified the killer as James Earl Ray, a former convict.

Mr. Ray was apprehended after an international manhunt and pleaded guilty to the charge. He has now repudiated his confession and is seeking a new trial. Mr. Ray, who is serving a life sentence in Tennessee, had no comment on Mr. Levi's order, according to prison officials.

The Justice Department spokesman could not estimate when the review would be completed. He said that the Attorney General had set no time limit on it. He said that one lawyer in the Civil Division had characterized the investigation as "incredibly thorough."

In two days of hearings last week, the Senate intelligence committee disclosed a pattern of harassment by the F.B.I. that began in 1962 and dogged Dr. King until his death.

The bureau placed 16 wiretaps and eight room bugs on telephones or premises used by Dr. King. It had obtained authorization for only three from Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy in 1963 on the ground that it suspected that Communist sympathizers had infiltrated the civil rights movement.

In addition to the electronic surveillance of Dr. King, testimony showed that the bureau had attempted to stop a college from giving him an honorary degree, tried to keep him from getting an audience with the Pope and once sent him a tape recording of allegedly unsavory incidents picked up by telephone taps and room bugs.

The tape was accompanied by a letter that warned Dr. King, "There is only one thing left for you to do. You know what it is . . . you are done. There is but one way out for you."

Dr. King regarded this as an effort to drive him to suicide, according to statements made at the hearings.

25 Separate Incidents

James B. Adams, an associate deputy director of the F.B.I., said that the bureau had discovered 25 separate incidents of harassment of Dr. King.

Mr. Adams acknowledged in his testimony that here was "no statutory basis or justification" for the F.B.I.'s action against Dr. King.

Of the various acts of harassment, the Senate investigators found one that came within days of Dr. King's death. According to Michael Epstein, a member of the staff, when Dr. King first went to Memphis in behalf of striking garbage workers in March 1968, he stayed at a motel owned by whites.

Bureau documents showed that the F.B.I. had suggested leaking this information to the press. There was no evidence that it did, Mr. Epstein testified, but several news organizations sent out an article saying that Dr. King stayed at the white establishment.

When he returned to Memphis in early April, he registered at the black-owned Lorraine Hotel, where he was killed.

The Justice Department has for some time been conducting a separate investigation to determine whether any agents violated the law in the treatment of Dr. King.